

Fasting in Ramadan

By Imam Khalid Chahhou

What is Fasting?

Fasting is another unique moral and spiritual characteristic of Islam. Literally defined, fasting means to completely abstain from foods, drinks and intimate intercourse, before the break of the dawn till sunset, during the entire month of Ramadan.

The meaning of Fasting should not be restricted to this literal sense; otherwise we would be sadly mistaken. That is to say that when this fourth pillar of Islam was introduced, it planted an ever-growing tree of infinite virtue and invaluable products. Here are ten spiritual meanings of Fasting:

- ✦ It teaches man the principle of sincere Love towards God the Almighty & His Messenger (peace be upon him).
- ✦ It imbues in man the genuine virtue of effective devotion, honest dedication and closeness to God; because when he fasts he does so for God and for His sake alone.
- ✦ It cultivates in man a vigilant and sound conscience; because the fasting person keeps his fast in secret as well as in public.
- ✦ It trains man to be patient, as through fasting, he feels the pains of deprivation but he endures them patiently.
- ✦ It is an effective lesson in applied moderation and willpower.
- ✦ It also provides man with a transparent soul, a clear mind and a light body.
- ✦ It shows man a new way of wise savings and sound budgeting.
- ✦ It grounds man in discipline and healthy survival.
- ✦ It originates in man the real spirit of social belonging, unity and brotherhood, of equality before God as well as before the law.
- ✦ It is a Godly prescription for self-reassurance and self-control.

Types of Fasting

Fasting Ramadan is obligatory on every responsible and fit Muslim. But there are other times when it is recommended to make voluntary fasting. Among these times are Mondays and Thursdays of every week, a few days of each month in the two months heralding the coming of Ramadan, i.e., Rajab and Sha'ban, six days of the month "Shawal" (after Ramadan following the 'Eid-ul-Fitr Day). Besides, it is always compensating to fast any day of any month of the year, except the Eid Days.

Fasting Ramadan is compulsory upon every Muslim, male or female, who has these qualifications:

- ✚ To be mentally and physically fit, which means to be sane and able.
- ✚ To be of full age, the age of puberty and discretion, which is normally about fourteen. Children under this age should be encouraged to start this good practice on easy levels, so when they reach the age of puberty they will be mentally and physically prepared to observe fasting.
- ✚ To be present at one's permanent settlement, your home town, one's farm, and one's business premises, etc. This means not to be on a journey of about fifty miles or more.
- ✚ To be fairly certain that fasting is unlikely to cause you any harm, physical or mental, other than the normal reactions to hunger, thirst, etc.

Exemption from Fasting

These said qualifications exclude the following categories:

- ✚ Children under the age of puberty and discretion.
- ✚ Insane people who are unaccountable for their deeds. People of these two categories are exempted from the duty of fast, and no compensation or any other substitute is enjoined on them.
- ✚ Men and women who are too old and feeble to undertake the obligation of fast and bear its hardships. Such people are exempted from this duty, but they must offer, at least, one needy poor Muslim an average full meal or its value per person per day.
- ✚ Sick people whose health is likely to be severely affected by the observance of fast. They may postpone the fast, as long as they are sick, to a later date and make up for it, a day for a day.
- ✚ Travelers may break the fast temporarily during their travel only and make up for it in later days, a day for a day
- ✚ Pregnant women and women breast-feeding their children may also break the fast, if its observance is likely to endanger their own health or that of their infants. But they must make up for the fast at a delayed time, a day for a day.
- ✚ Women in the -period of menstruation (of a maximum of ten days or of confinement (of a maximum of forty days); They must postpone the fast till recovery and then make up for it, a day for a day.

It should be understood that here, like in all other Islamic undertakings, the intention must be made clear that this action is undertaken in obedience to God, in response to His command and out of love of Him.

The fast of any day of Ramadan becomes void by intentional eating or drinking or smoking or indulgence in any intimate intercourse, and by allowing anything to enter through the mouth into the interior parts of the body. And if this is done deliberately without any lawful reason, this is a major sin, which only renewed repentance can expiate.

If anyone, through forgetfulness, does something that would ordinarily break the fast, the observance is not nullified, and his fast stands valid, provided he stops doing that thing the moment he realizes what he is doing.

On completion of the fast of Ramadan, the special charity known as Sadakat-ul-Fitr (charity of 'Fast-breaking) must be distributed before 'Eid-ul-Fitr (approximately), seven dollars per head.

General Recommendations

It is strongly recommended by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to observe these practices especially during Ramadan:

- To have a light meal before the break of the dawn, known as Suhoor.
- To eat a few dates or start breaking the fast by plain water right after sunset, saying this prayer “*Allahumma laka sumna, wa 'ala rizqika aftarna*”. (O God! for Your sake have we fasted and now we break the fast with the food You have given us).
- To make your meals as light as possible because, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) put it, the worst thing man can fill is his stomach.
- To observe the supererogatory prayer known as Taraweeh.
- To exchange social visits and intensify humanitarian services.
- To increase the study and recitation of the Qur'an.
- To exert the utmost in patience and humbleness.
- To be extraordinarily cautious in using one's senses, one's mind and, especially, the tongue; to abstain from careless gossip and avoid all suspicious motions.